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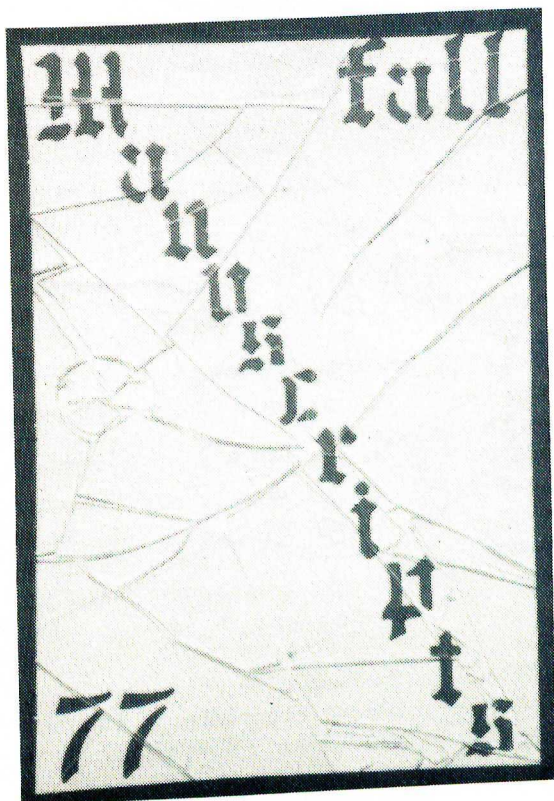
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## *Manuscripts*

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When you have quieted your mind enough and transcended your ego enough, you can hear how it really is.

Richard Alpert, *Journey*

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\*Freshman Writing



## LAMENT OF ONE WHO WAITS

Pam Williams

He talks of marriage  
And his mom says I'm part of the family.  
He throws "forever" around  
like it didn't weigh a thing.  
He's got a lifetime planned  
and it's all just for me.  
But I say no.  
Lord, what's the matter with me?

I tell myself  
it's beautiful that I'm so loved.  
Must I love in return?  
Does it have to work  
both ways?  
I've never known a man  
to be so good to me.  
But I say no.  
Lord, what's the matter with me?

I could compromise myself  
And pacify my doubts with apologies.  
Perhaps in time, someday  
I could learn, yes, I could learn  
to care.  
But I can't shake this feeling  
That somewhere there has to be more.  
So I say no.  
Lord, what's the matter with me?

## WITHDRAWAL SYMPTOMS

Kevin Cook

"Why, good evening, Joseph A. McPherson! You can't imagine what a pleasure it is to see you again. How is your dog, Sheba?" The computerized bankmachine almost smiled as it began transactions. The sign above the console read, "YOUR FRIENDLY BANK-MACHINE—SO PERSONAL IT'S ALMOST AS HUMAN AS YOU ARE," and the madly competitive banks of the new century didn't fool around when it came to personalizing the business.

"She's fine . . . fine . . ." mumbled Joe McPherson as he wondered absently if he could take thirty credits from the machine without having deposited any in months. His balance was only one half credit, but he had been mulling over a plan to take advantage of the bankmachine. He opened the small compartment holding deposit blanks, and filled out a form stating that he was entering 100 full credits. The machine engulfed the form, hummed, hummed again, then did some operation that made a sound like an embarrassed cough, and returned the envelope.

"Ahem. Pardon me, Mr. McPherson. I'm sure I have made an error." Machines were always to consider the customer right. At least at first.

"You stated that you were entering 100 credits."

"Umm . . . yes. Right."

"But no credits registered, sir. Probably I distracted you with my question about your dog. Please include the credits, and I will quickly take care of the matter." Smile.

"Uh . . . What do you mean? I put 'em in there. You must have missed them. And I want them credited right now." In spite of the fact that Joe had waited until late at night to approach the machine, another customer had padded up behind him, and was waiting discreetly a few feet away. Joe began to perspire around the temples, and jabbed twice at the "REPEAT" button before he hit it.

Hmmmmmmmmmm. Hmmmmmmmmmm.

"No, sir, sorry, Mr. McPherson. There are no credits present."

"Look, you. You're only a machine. I'm a person, and I'm always right. Now give me the credits I told you to." Joe hissed the instructions, banging on the "WITHDRAWAL" button.

A bright blue glare came on the viewscreen, and the image of an extremely dignified man appeared. "Hello. This is a recording," the man said in a conspiratorial voice, so the other customer could not hear. (They were very careful to protect your feelings). "There seems to be a malfunction of the machine at this time. We are very sorry. Would you please come into the bank tomorrow, so that we may serve you immediately? Present this green coin for preferential treatment." The man smiled sincerely and vanished. beepbeepbeep. A green plastic chip popped out of a slot. Joe snatched it up and stuck it in his pocket and ducked his head as he turned to hurry away.

"Is the thing out of order?" asked the waiting customer.

Joe just mumbled and turned toward his cycle. "Damn tin can..."

When he got home he collapsed into a beanbag and tried to think. Joe was not a very smart person, really. He had a recorded I.Q. of 130, and had washed out early in high school. He'd never seemed to be able to hold on to a job, or to figure out a way to get some cash into the pockets of his foamknits. But he had really thought he could fool a machine, especially since they were fixed to think the human was always right. He guessed he just didn't know enough about banks and bankmachines to beat the built-in protections.

He thought about the question about Sheba. This was the first one that had ever gotten quite that personal. He'd seen a recent newstape that described some of the innovations that personalized some of the machines, and he figured that this must have been one of those. A faint new glimmer—most of Joe's glimmers were pretty faint—took shape in his head, and he jumped up and headed for another bankmachine in the other direction.

He walked up to the shiny steel-and-glass console, putting his hand over the print panel. The glass glowed, and the voice—not like the other one—came.

"Hi there, Joseph A. McPherson! Isn't it a pleasant night? The temperature is twenty-four degrees Centigrade, and it is exactly 11:43 p.m. May I help you?"

"No, not really. I just wanted to get my balance."

"Of course, sir. No trouble at all. Your present balance is—forty-nine hundredths of one credit." The cheery voice sounded nervous at calling out such a low amount.

Joe thought a minute, then added, "Do you answer other questions?"



"If they are about banking, sir. We are here to serve you." Smile.

"Well, uh...do you take pictures, or keep records of questions?"

"Why, yes, sir, to both questions." The machine seemed delighted that it could answer in the affirmative. It was almost jaunty. Joe, feeling outgunned, scurried away down the sidewalk. He would have to learn more.

He spent the next few days after work going from bankmachine to bankmachine, figuring out the differences among them. One of the first machines ever installed was in the run-down business district, and Joe waited in line for a long time to speak to it. When he did he immediately noticed a difference, something that set this machine off from all the others. It seemed more tired, and not quite as quick-witted. There was a brittleness to its tone that suggested impatience and fatigue. This was the one.

It was past midnight a few nights later when Joe poked his head around the corner and saw the steel and glass thing waiting in the mall. No one was around. His footsteps echoed until they were swallowed by the street ventilators. He hurried up to it, and pushed his hand against the print panel. There was a puzzled hum, then the old voice, "Good evening. I seem to be having a little trouble with transmission. Is that you, Andrew Darnell?"

Joe smiled and raised his hand, still raw from the sandpaper, from the glass. "Of course it is. Can't you tell by my print?"

"Sir, the print looks smudged. Would you please put your other hand up to the glass?" It sounded petulant.

"No," snapped Joe. "Listen. This is a hold-up. Give me all the credits in your files or I'll strangle this little child I have with me. I have her under my foot right this minute."

Hmmmmmmmmmm. Hmmmmmmmmmm.

A bright blue light came onto the viewscreen, but before the unctuous man could speak, Joe said again, "I'm not kidding. Here goes!" And he ducked down below the range of the machine's cameras and emitted a high-pitched squeal. "OOOOOOOOOH, aaaaaaaa! Oooooooooo Gooooooooo!"

He stood up again, looking as malevolent as he could muster. "Now, give me those credits!"

Hmmmmmmmmmm. Beeeeeeep. Hmmmmmmmmmm.

There were whirrs and clanking sounds, and Joe was ready to run when the small door opened and a brown envelope appeared. He grabbed for it, but as he reached it a manacle snaked out and clamped

itself around his wrist. Joe pulled, jerked, and broke into a sweat, but the brace held. In the meantime, the voice of the bankmachine was saying, "Please forgive me, Mr. Darnell. Surely there has been some mistake. Security officers will be here shortly to disengage you."

Joe thought furiously. His brow furrowed. Then he yelled at the thing, "Okay, you asked for it. I'm going to stomp on this little boy I have here until he's killed." Not noticing he had transformed the small girl into a small boy, he began to make stamping motions, and his false beard and mustache started to become unglued. So did the machine.

"Stop it! Stop it!" it screeched, totally distraught. "Don't hurt the poor dear!"

The manacle dropped loose. Joe darted away, stopped, didn't see anyone coming. He dashed back for the envelope, then ran again as the machine fogged up and printed out nonsense on its screen.

"Here! Take these, too," it screamed. "Take it all!"

Joe was afraid now, afraid that the police would be showing up any minute and afraid that the bankmachine he had reduced to a sobbing heap would explode. But he grabbed seven or eight more envelopes, looked both ways, crossed the street, and raced away. Around the corner, he hid in a doorway, removing his clever disguise. He was jubilant, the man who had committed the perfect crime. They hadn't been so smart that they could match prints and facial characteristics yet. They relied on the prints, and just recorded the faces. Joe had a bundle of credits. Nobody could trace him. He wasn't so dumb after all.

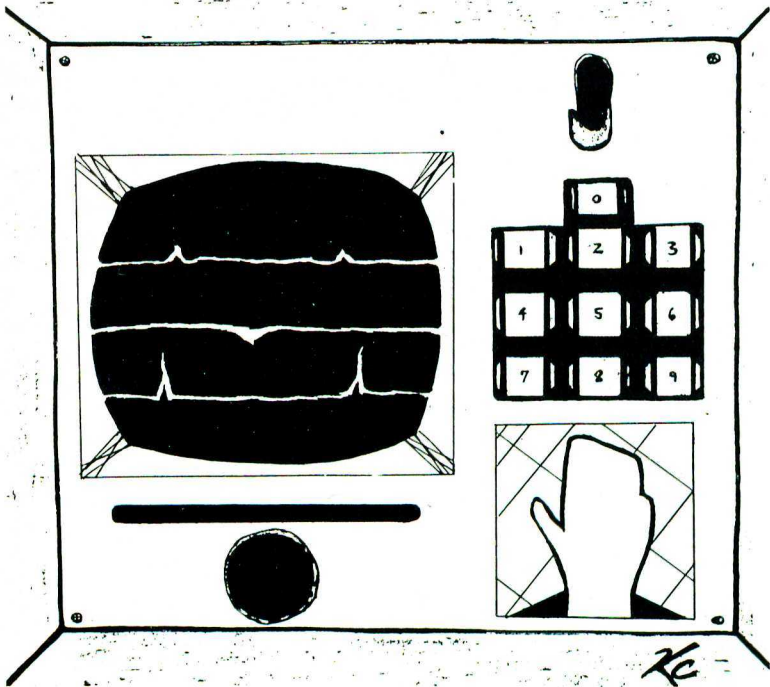
He hurried home, patted Sheba, and threw himself down in his chair. He took his time, relishing his security and his new money—more, for sure, than he could earn in ten years.

When his heart stopped racing, and completed its victory lap, he opened one of the fat envelopes, and put his hand down among—dozens and dozens of small green chips. He gasped, grabbing a handful out, and tossed the thin circles up into the air. After doing this with every one of the envelopes, Joe just sat there, green chips falling off his head, rolling across glazed eyes, to clink and roll around on the floor.

Andrew Darnell walked up to that same machine downtown early the next morning, but an unctuous man informed him that it was regrettably out of order. However, if Mr. Darnell could only come in to the bank, he would receive preferential attention upon showing the teller one of the bank's green discs. A little door opened up and the

machine pushed out twenty thousand credits, whispering in a crazed tone, "here you deranged maniac just don't kill that baby hmm-mmmmm beep pop"

Darnell stroked his beard, marveling at the wonders of automation.





## CONTEMPORARY CONTENT

Karen Greene

Beethoven composed his fifth—  
You hummed a sixth.  
Homer wrote the Iliad and you cried for Odysseus.  
Teflon finally fried an egg—  
You demanded Teflon II.  
Why weren't you happy with Godfather I?  
Wasn't Jenny's death enough for you?  
Do you need a sequel to heaven?  
Or how about one for World War II?  
You aren't content with "happily ever after,"  
And you wish to alter "once upon a time."  
Well, what about good ol' laughter and bronzing the iambic pentameter line?

Build your Roman Empire wearing Etruscan underwear.  
Bury Atlantis deep and well supplied.  
Cupid won't care.  
Chickens may not always lay eggs and cows may give Wanzer.  
So keep pushing and progressing.  
Try that Grecian Formula 6. It won't wash it all away.  
No matter how high and wide, the walls of Jericho are destined to fall.

## AN EPISODE IN AUGUST

Carla Stoneberg

Now that all these years have passed, I believe I might at last be able to share this story. It is hard to do, however, because long ago on a sandy beach Mary Beth and I swore to each other, in the true-to-the-death comradeship of twelve-year-old girls, that we would never, never, never reveal to anyone what happened out there on the lake that August afternoon. Please forgive me, Mary Beth, but the conspiracy of silence is over. I am about to tell all.

It happened on a warm, sun-soaked Friday afternoon at a youth resort camp by one of Minnesota's ten thousand lakes. In obedience to the demands of the heat and humidity of those summer dog days, the campers were all resting in their cabins and would remain there until mid-afternoon, when the beach officially opened. But for Mary Beth and for me, the start of the camp's siesta signaled the moment for us to begin our illicit adventure. For several days we had been practicing our free style stroke in the lake, building up strength for this very day—the day when we would each attempt to swim across the entire distance of that beckoning body of water.

I would swim across first while Mary Beth rowed along beside me in a boat. Mary Beth, then, would swim back while I manned the oars. The lifeguard had warned us not to try this. He had estimated the distance to be over a mile. We would be committing an inexcusable violation of camp rules. But in true preadolescent rebellion, we were determined to try.

Silently we escaped from our cabin and slipped down to the deserted beach with its gleaming, empty lifeguard's tower. We were heady with excitement. As we shoved the boat into the water, however, I did have one fleeting moment of unease. For some reason, I remembered a little thing my pigtailed friend had done at the start of our week together at the camp. Mary Beth had thrown away the orange and white capsules she had brought with her from home. "I know I don't really need these," she had said with smug satisfaction as she dumped them into the weeds behind the cabin. I had wondered at this; but I had said nothing, thus becoming a self-indicated co-conspirator.

"C'mon!" Mary Beth called, bringing my thoughts back to the adventure at hand. "Your turn first!"

I actually made it safely across that lake. At the far shore I climbed into the boat, and Mary Beth turned it around. Then she kicked off her sandals and dived in to begin her own conquest of the water. I remember admiring her strong, confident strokes as she started out.

Twenty minutes later Mary Beth was swimming easily across the deepest part of the lake. Rowing slowly beside her, I saw how the moving oars dribbled drops of water onto the surface of the glassy lake, making arcs of ripples. I saw how they radiated out to touch my smoothly gliding friend. She would make it, too; I just knew she would! Then how we would celebrate! What fun we would have telling the kids . . .

Roused from my reverie, I saw a sudden, frantic paleness spreading over the face of the swimmer. Not understanding, I still instinctively dropped the oars and reached out for Mary Beth's extended, wet hand. We made contact a split second before her body went rigid and still in the water.

"Mary Beth!" I screamed, pulling her toward me. Blessed adrenalin (though then I did not know its name) surged through my entire musculature and gave me the strength I needed to pull her wildly jerking body to the edge of the boat. It was all I could do to keep her head just barely above water as her eyes disappeared somewhere under her upper lids. Horrified, I prayed fervently that she would please, God, oh *please*, start breathing again. My own heart stopped beating, it seemed, until she did. An absolute age, an unimaginable eon of time, passed as I held her head pressed there against the outside of the boat. What if she slipped from my grasp? When I could again think coherently, I slowly edged her now-limp body around to the straight back end of the boat. Somehow I managed to pull her up, over the end, and in. Shaking uncontrollably, I knelt over her inert form as it lay in the bottom of the gently rocking boat. But each time I saw her chest rise and fall, I shot volleys of gratitude heavenward. She was alive!

After a while Mary Beth's respirations became regular and even. Presently she opened her eyes and moaned. After many long minutes she moved her lips and asked softly, "What happened?"

\* \* \* \* \*

One morning years later when I was a budding nursing student, I began preparing medications at a community hospital. I opened a



bottle of pills and suddenly saw again those same orange and white capsules. My knees went weak in remembering, and I had to sit down. But this time I knew. In my hand I held Dilantin, a powerful drug which was still, after all those years, one of the biggest guns in the ever-expanding artillery against epilepsy.

## SILENCE OF TIME

Anonymous

silence of time  
    passing by.  
days filled with no more  
    than blueberry pancakes  
    and trips to the beach.  
no decisions to make  
no intense thought;  
    only the rush of the surf  
    against sunburnt arms  
    and fleeting images  
    of sand castles melting  
    against the shore.  
emerge  
    refreshed.  
the sun reaching into  
    the soul  
    dispersing the greyish tinge  
    of yesterday mornings.  
return home  
    along with shadows of dusk  
    content to know  
the sun can  
    still make you smile.

## THE WOODCHUCK AND THE PORPOISE

Mike Pettygrove

i  
could not  
shoot  
the woolly  
fool  
and  
was  
berated  
for  
it

pest!  
crop-eater  
rodent—  
herbivore!

but  
as for  
the  
other,

who's  
to  
propose  
a  
purpose

for the  
grand  
amorphous  
porpoise?

it  
lives

WASHINGTON, D. C.:  
CITY OF SUNLIGHT, CITY OF SHADE

Sandra Long

During a six-week stay in Washington, D. C., I acquired the usual tourist's conception of the nation's capital. The images of lighted monuments, the Smithsonian exhibits on everything from diamonds to dinosaurs, and the impressive pageantry of the convening of the House or Senate combine within my mind to form a jumbled composite picture of the city. Because I lived in the inner city, however, I also saw a part of Washington most tourists don't visit. Instead of lighted monuments and beautiful buildings, I saw the broken sidewalks and crowded tenements of the inner city slum. Having a more realistic conception of the city as a whole, then, I saw the District of Columbia as a city of paradoxes, a place at one time as hopeful and bright as the sunlight which shone on the white granite buildings and as frighteningly dark as the sinister forces that have made that city one of the crime centers of the United States.

Each morning as I walked to work, I tried to take a new route so as to see more of the Capitol Hill area where I lived. Perhaps it was because of the early morning sun and the refreshing blue sky over my head, or the patterns of sunlight which sifted down through the tree-shaded walk to dance along the sidewalk in front of me, but I always made that walk with a mingled feeling of joy and awe. Musing to myself as I passed silently through the landscaped grounds of the Capitol, I often marveled at the minute planning which seemed to have gone into each facet of the nation's capital. I had already learned that the city was carefully plotted to encompass an exact ten-mile area, and after riding the buses a few days I learned that the city was divided into four quadrants as well. Tree-lined streets and the impressive Supreme Court Building and the Capitol, both modeled after classical structures, made the governmental area impressive and served as proof of the meticulous planning which had been done to insure the aesthetic quality of the site. Freshly-trimmed green lawns surround the Capitol, offering a resting place for weary visitors as well as a natural lunchroom for employees in the congressional offices. The masses of blooming flowers in beds and planters throughout the grounds provide a striking contrast to the white sandstone and granite Capitol. Since new varieties are trans-



planted with each new season, the flowers bloom throughout the spring, summer, and fall. At the steps of the Capitol stand the ever-present security guards, smilingly tipping their hats to young girls and adding their watchful eye to the carefully tended scene.

But a city characterized by careful planning, Washington, D.C., also manages to exhibit the seemingly careless inner city deterioration found in all urban areas. Within only a few blocks of the Capitol, for instance, lies a part of the city that differs considerably from Capitol Hill. The run-down brick tenements of the D. C. slums contain no marble or granite, nor are they tended by any save the occupants who can afford to do so. Long ago forsaken by the city, the crumbling steps and peeling paint of the buildings show none of the meticulous care given to the tourist's part of Washington. Only the people who sit and stare from open, curtainless windows and sagging porches offer any proof that this part of Washington is as much a part of the city as is the Washington of Capitol Hill.

During my stay I saw, too, that the District of Columbia was at the same time a hub of growth and development and a place of stagnation and decay. On my way to work I could never cross the street without dodging the rubble and machinery which gave evidence of the work being done on the Metro, a new underground mass transit system developed to meet the needs of a growing city. Construction materials and scaffolding blocked the sidewalks, and the rumble of cranes signaled the tremendous amount of construction going on in the already crowded city.

A short walk into the "other Washington" also led to broken sidewalks and streets holding an accumulation of rubble, but in the D. C. slums this is the debris of decay rather than a sign of growth. The people who live in this part of Washington are not involved in the decision-making processes of a nation or even of the District of Columbia itself. Ignored both by the federal administration and the municipal government, the slum areas illustrate the stagnation found even within a modern, growing Washington, D.C.

The concerns and interests of the people of the two sectors of the city differ markedly, too. The people who live in the slum sections of D.C. are primarily the Black Americans who make up over ninety percent of the city's population. Impotent insofar as their government is concerned, these people are more worried about how they can feed and clothe their families than whether or not H.R. 1106 is passed in the Senate.

In contrast to these relatively impotent Americans in the capital city are those people who form the basic governmental work force and serve as the forces behind the Presidents, Representatives, and Senators we elect. Commuting by bus or car from their residential homes in Maryland or Virginia, these people exude an air of confidence in their brisk walk and knowing manner. Carrying stuffed briefcases and the inevitable *Washington Post*, they move with purpose, confident in the knowledge that they are necessary cogs in the power machine of a nation. The alert expressions on their faces make evident the intelligence and drive which seem to characterize those who enter the political scene. Rather than experiencing a feeling of impotence, these people have felt the power of being in the position to know on Monday the facts the media will release to the general public on Wednesday, and they have experienced the feeling of accomplishment that comes from having been able to contribute, even to a small extent, to the day-to-day functioning of government.

Surely the real Washington, D.C. must lie somewhere between the stark reality of the filthy liquor store, barred at the windows and subjected to repeated arson and robbery attempts, and the relative fantasy world seen by the tourist, clutching kids and Kodak Instamatic, who sees the Washington of the guidebooks. Crime, squalor, and governmental indifference are as much a fact of life in the District of Columbia as are the governmental institutions and monuments built by and for our nation's forefathers. With its blend of the harsh reality of the present and the dreams of the past, Washington, D. C. is truly a city of intriguing contrasts.

It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, and impossible to find it elsewhere.

Agnes Repplier





## PEACE OF MIND

Anonymous

peace of mind  
    hard to retain for  
        tranquil moments escape  
    leaving only the taste of  
        some sweeter nectar.  
being aware of  
    “gathered time.”  
    a few undisturbed minutes of  
sunshine shimmering through  
        yellow-orange leaves  
    extending warmth  
        to the corners of  
        her october soul.  
delicate chords  
        remembered from a lost album  
    whose title has been long forgotten  
    but the refrain  
    “free as dancing flowers .  
    upon the earth”  
        brings a smile  
and the humming of an offkey melody.  
    old friends refinding  
        the threads that once linked their lives.  
    broken?  
    no, perhaps slightly torn.  
        even now,  
            we learn to linger over coffee  
            and too many cigarettes.  
... and under shadowed birch  
    they talked of lost time,  
        don'ts,  
        shared feelings of restlessness.  
unconsciously,  
    she hummed the dancing flower song  
    and he answered  
        gently singing,  
        “planting their seeds  
        in mind's impressions.”  
  
he understood.

## I AM LOVE

Elizabeth Chace

My life has begun eternity  
beyond the sun and moon  
I feel that this is the beginning  
that I shall live on  
and on to see the world fade  
and those I love pass  
My life has flown over a million years  
of giving and taking  
loving and hating  
I go beyond time's greatest virtue  
for it doesn't pass  
I have seen you bloom and wilt  
My life has begun eternity  
I want nothing from you  
I ask nothing of God or good or life  
I am here, and I shall always be  
I dance by the moonlight  
far into the dawn  
I sing you sweet melodies  
and shower you with sorrow  
I give and take your greatest possessions  
I care not if I hurt you  
for I always do  
I am selfish, I am greed  
I hunger on attention  
I am Love, I am Love, I am Love  
Love me, hate me, despise me, elate me  
For whatever you do  
I will always be there  
For I am Love, I am Love  
I am Love

## MIRACLES NEVER CEASE

Mindy Welch

It was just an ordinary autumn school night: my sister Darcy discussing her math with a friend over the phone as I did my homework at our desk, my brother Jim pretending to study with the Doobie Brothers blaring from his stereo, my younger brother Casey reading *Sporting News Magazine* in bed, and my parents relaxing either in front of the television or behind *Time Magazine* in the family room. Suddenly our concentration was shattered by the sound of Mom's voice hollering: "Darcy, Mindy, Jim, Casey—come down here—I want to have a few words with you!"

These words were familiar to all of us, and in the past had always indicated trouble. As we congregated in the hall outside our bedrooms, we all stared accusingly at one another, wondering whose mischief or bad behavior called for this meeting. With strong apprehension, the four of us marched downstairs like a mob of bandits about to face trial and sentence.

Mom spoke calmly: "You all know I'm leaving tomorrow morning to go shopping in Chicago. Now I'm giving each of you two tries to guess the things I'm looking for to buy."

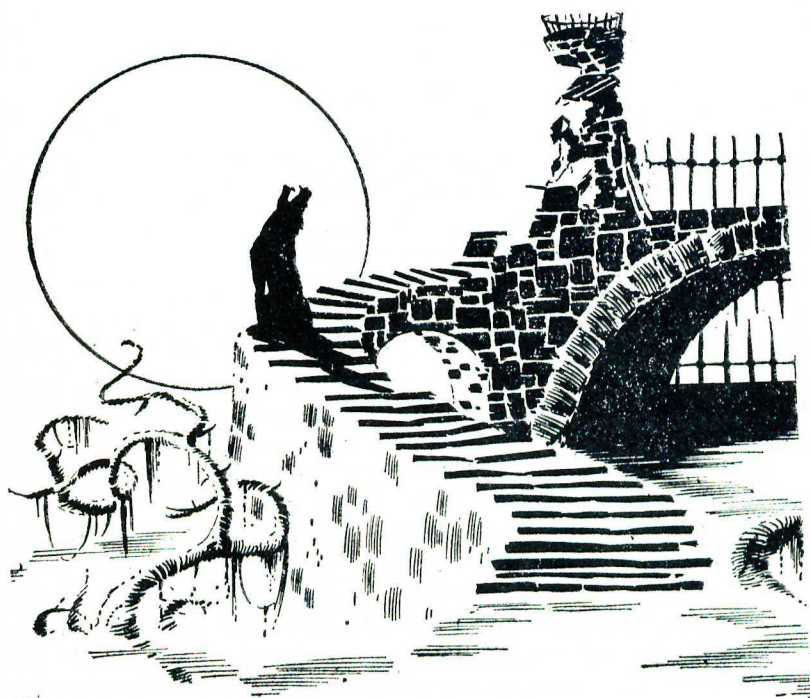
An enormous sigh of relief poured from each of us, knowing that we weren't going to be scolded or punished for anything. Eagerly we started shouting out a flurry of items Mom might buy: blue jeans, overalls, hot pants, mini skirts, mink stoles, tennis dress, golf shoes,—giggling more and more the longer we continued. In the middle of our suggestions, Jim cackled: "maternity dress" which nearly fractured each of us until a subtle hush fell throughout the room, centering our attention on Mom. She sort of nodded her head, yes, tears filled her eyes, and the happiest, most joyous smile swept across her face. Momentarily stunned, we turned to Dad looking for his reaction—only to find his gleaming smile twice the size of Mom's. It took a few minutes but she finally convinced us that she was expecting a baby in five months. It seemed like too much of a blessing to be true a new baby in our home. The excitement impacted in this single evening was enough to shake the stars and rattle the earth.



## FOR BENO—

Thomas Outt

Unlike war followed by peace  
You left me with despair  
Followed by despair.  
An unaided refugee  
Camped alone  
Deprived of misery's love.  
Only dramatic-absurdist thoughts  
My friends whose entertainment  
Endowed the inane with exalted abstractions.  
Yes, sight rendered the dying  
Hyacinth distressed victim  
Stoically endured to the pre-chartered course.  
Shots destroyed, followed by death  
I left with despair  
Followed by despair.



## A DUAL VIEWPOINT STORY

Mike Ellis

Arnold reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out his cigarettes. He took one out of the pack and lit it. Taking a deep puff he looked over to Karen.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

She dropped her head and began to sob. Her lips curled into her mouth and she quickly shook her head.

"You've been awfully quiet," he said. "Isn't there something that's bothering you?"

Wiping her blue eyes with her fingers, Karen looked at him. Her expression implied a plea for understanding.

"Something must have happened over there in Finland that you ought to tell me about. What is it?"

Arnold took another puff on his cigarette. What could have happened that she's so upset, he thought. He couldn't think what he'd done that was so wrong. Sure he still smoked dope and he'd dropped out of school, but those were things they'd gotten over a long time ago.

"Come on. Can't you talk to me any more?"

Karen looked away. She's getting more distant from me, he thought. Maybe he shouldn't have gone away to work in Iowa. She still said she loved him, even though she'd gone on dates with other guys. That was the agreement they had. He didn't like her going out with other guys, but she didn't care for his smoking dope too much either. Couldn't she understand the difference?

Arnold took one more puff and put the cigarette out.

"Karen, if you would only tell me what's bothering you."

She took a deep breath and looked into his eyes. Reaching for his hand she grasped it and spoke.

"I met this guy in Finland."

"Yeah, so? Did you go out with him?"

"Yeah."

"Much?"

"Uh huh."

"Was he a friend of Erna's?"

"Yes."

"Well, so what? You've gone out with other guys before."



"This was different."

"Why?"

Karen looked away and began to sob again. Arnold released his hand from her grasp and held her shoulders with both his hands. He shook her gently and with one hand moved her face around to look directly at her.

"What did you do, Karen?"

"Arnold, I love you."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't love him. He was just so gentle."

"Karen!"

"Oh Arnold, I'm so sorry."

"You slept with him, didn't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"How many times?"

She shook her head away from Arnold's hold and sobbed into her hands.

"Twice."

Arnold stood up. He reached up and rubbed his eyes with one hand and began to pace. How could she do it to him? He'd never even been out with another girl, let alone slept with one. He could see it coming, he thought. He knew it would happen once she went away to school. What did her sorority sisters say about him? "Oh what a dud. He doesn't have a job, he's not in school, and all he does is smoke dope." So what? What the hell difference does that make? But god damn! If she was going to dump him why did she have to do it like that? Especially when they were still supposed to be engaged.

"Karen, do you still want to see me?"

She looked up quickly. "Do you?"

"I don't know. I guess what you did means you don't want to see me."

"I thought you didn't want to see me any more when you went away to Iowa."

Sitting back down, Arnold put his arm around her. She turned her head away.

"Karen, that was already after you'd gone out with a few guys at school. And besides, I came back, didn't I?"

"Oh, Arnold."

"Aren't you glad I did?"

"Yes," she said tentatively.

"Well, aren't you?"

"Arnold, what are you going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you going to get a job and quit smoking dope?"

"Oh, god. You're sure one to talk after what you did."

"What difference does it make? You don't love me."

"Of course I do. We're engaged!"

"You're not ready to take any responsibilities. I don't want to live on welfare."

Arnold took his arm from around her. The dumb little bitch. Still the same old line. He couldn't believe it. After what she'd done to him she still wanted him to "settle down."

"What about you? If I were to settle down, would you still go out and sleep with any guy you wanted to?"

"Arnold!"

"Well? I think what you've done to me is a hell of a lot worse than what I ever did to you. Smoking dope never hurt you personally."

Karen began to cry, with mixed sadness and rage. She breathed heavily and lashed out at Arnold.

"You hurt me a long time ago, Arnold."

"What do you mean?"

"You promised me when we first started going out that you'd never ask me to go to bed with you."

"You wanted to as much as I did."

"Sure I did. But I thought it would be better for after we got married."

"We were going to get married anyway."

"I know. So why couldn't you accept the responsibility of marriage?"

So that was it, he thought. She still hadn't forgiven him for that. What difference did it make? They were going to get married. Why not do it right away if they loved each other? That still didn't excuse what she'd done in Finland. Arnold figured that he just couldn't live with that.

"I guess this is it, Karen."

She turned her head to him rapidly.

"What do you mean?"

"Infidelity's the one thing I can't put up with."

Karen's eyes and mouth opened wide. She began to moan as she put both hands to the sides of her head and cried. Arnold fought off

tears as well.

"I hate to do it, Karen. But it was your choice. I'm sorry."

Wiping tears from his eyes, Arnold stood up. He put his hand on Karen who lay on the couch, sobbing uncontrollably.

"I'm sorry, Karen. I'm so sorry."

He picked up his jacket and wiped his eyes off with the sleeve. Putting the jacket on he crossed the floor, opened the door, and left.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sitting on the couch, Karen wrung her hands as Arnold lit a cigarette. After he had exhaled the smoke, he spoke.

"Is there something you want to tell me?"

She began to cry. Oh god! What will he say, she thought. Why did he come back? It would have been so much better if he'd stayed in Iowa. She shook her head.

"You've been awfully quiet," he said. "Isn't there something that's bothering you?"

Oh, Arnold, she thought. It seemed like he had left her for good when he went to Iowa. Karen wiped her eyes. If he only knew. If he knew what it was he wouldn't want her to tell him.

Arnold spoke again.

"Something must have happened over there in Finland that you ought to tell me about. What is it?"

Taking another puff on his cigarette, Arnold looked down at the floor. He had made her do it. He'd driven her to it. He had cheapened her. She had given him her virginity and he'd left her like that. Oh god. I'm nothing, she thought.

"Come on. Can't you talk to me any more?" Arnold said.

She looked away. Sure, she'd tell him. It wouldn't make any difference any more. After what he'd done to her, why not?

Putting out his cigarette, Arnold pleaded one more time.

"Karen, if you would only tell me what's bothering you."

She took a deep breath and grasped his hand.

"I met this guy in Finland."

"Yeah, so? Did you go out with him?"

"Yeah."

"Much?"

"Uh huh."

"Was he a friend of Erna's?"

"Yes."

"Well, so what? You've gone out with other guys before."



"This was different."

"Why?"

She turned her head away and began to cry. Did she have to spell it out for him? It should be obvious by now. Taking his hand from hers, Arnold held her shoulders with both hands and shook her gently. He reached for her chin with one hand and brought her face into a direct gaze at his.

"What did you do, Karen?"

"Arnold, I love you."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't love him. He was just so gentle."

"Karen."

"Oh Arnold. I'm so sorry."

"You slept with him, didn't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"How many times?"

Why was he so mean, she thought. She shook her head from his hold and sobbed into her hands.

"Twice."

Arnold stood up and began to pace. He rubbed his eyes, trying to conceal his tears. She was so sorry. She wished she had never met Arnold. What a mess her life had become. It was great to be in love with him for a while, she thought, but things were so different after they had begun sleeping together. He'd promised her that they'd never do it. And then he started smoking dope and he quit school. She was no better than any whore, she thought. Why did he have to go to Iowa? They were supposed to be engaged.

"Karen, do you still want to see me?"

Looking up quickly, she saw the pain on Arnold's face. What a question to ask, she thought. She had always wondered that about him.

"Do you?"

"I don't know. I guess what you did means you don't want to see me."

"I thought you didn't want to see me any more when you went away to Iowa."

Arnold sat down and put his arm around her.

"Karen, that was already after you'd gone out with a few guys at school. And besides, I came back, didn't I?"

That doesn't matter, she thought. The damage, the hurt, was already done. He should never have left.

"Oh, Arnold."

"Aren't you glad I did?"

"Yes," she said tentatively. He had only made things worse. Now she didn't know what to do.

"Well, aren't you?"

"Arnold, what are you going to do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean are you going to get a job and quit smoking dope?"

"Oh, god. You're sure one to talk after what you did."

"What difference does it make? You don't love me."

"Of course I do. We're engaged."

"You're not ready to take on any responsibilities. I don't want to live on welfare."

Quickly he took his arm from around her and scowled. He turned to her again and exploded.

"What about you? If I were to settle down would you still go out and sleep with any guy you wanted to?"

What a thing to say, she thought. It would never have happened if he hadn't left her.

"Arnold!"

"Well? I think what you've done to me is a hell of a lot worse than what I ever did to you. Smoking dope never hurt you personally."

She began to cry with a mixed pain and rage. What a fool, she thought. That wasn't it, Arnold. That wasn't what hurt her. Couldn't he see? If they had never gone to bed like she had begged him, he could still smoke all the dope he wanted. She had given herself to him. That was a responsibility, not to mention the ones that went with it. How could he be so cruel?

"You hurt me a long time ago, Arnold."

"What do you mean?"

"You promised me when we first started going out that you'd never ask me to go to bed with you."

"You wanted to as much as I did."

"Sure I did. But I knew it would be better after we got married."

"We were going to get married any way."

"I know. So why couldn't you learn to accept the responsibility of marriage?"

Arnold looked disgusted. Yes, that's it, she thought. Responsibility.

"I guess this is it, Karen."

She turned her head to him rapidly.

"What do you mean?"

"Infidelity's the one thing I can't put up with."

He had done it to her again. He's leaving and calling me a whore, she thought. She opened her eyes and mouth with hurt and shock and began to cry wildly. If he was going to leave why did he have to come back and torture her?

"I hate to do it, Karen. But it was your choice. I'm sorry."

Her life meant nothing. What would she do? She had slept with two different people now, but no one loved her. A whore. She was a whore. He patted her shoulder.

"I'm sorry, Karen. I'm so sorry."

She heard sobbing. Maybe he'll stay, she thought. Maybe he's hurt too. But before she looked up, Arnold had crossed the floor and opened the door. What would she do, she thought. What would she do?

The greatest happiness in the world is the conviction that we are loved, loved for ourselves, or rather loved in spite of ourselves.

Victor Hugo



## RED PENCIL MENTALITY

Elizabeth Chace

There are times  
When I often feel  
Things aren't going like they should.  
And when I try to change them,  
To make them go like I want them to go  
Someone tells me I'm wrong.  
And there are times  
When I often feel  
Things are going like they should  
And I don't try to change them  
I leave them perfect like they are  
And someone tells me I'm wrong.





## A CHARACTER SKETCH

John McCrum

The fire ate away at the barn with ravenous ferocity. From time to time a rafter beam would fall heavily to the floor, spitting showers of embers and flame into the night sky. Amid the awful roar and crackle of the fire there could be heard the frightened cry of a child.

Firemen and farmers struggled to subdue the blaze, frantically shooting powerful streams of water onto the remains of the roof. There was no chance to save the barn. The men, resigned to this realization, fought with one sole purpose in mind: to save the livestock and prevent the fire from spreading to the fields.

Bright burning chunks of wood burst into a spray of sparks, illuminating the night like a great roman candle. The roof was now beginning to cave in. With an agonizing groan, it slid slowly to the floor, a mass of seared timber.

Danny stared at the blaze, rooted hypnotically to the ground by the sight of the fiery barn. Just that afternoon he had been up in the hay mow; it had been replaced by the emptiness of the night sky. He smelled the acrid odor of burnt hay, as well as the singed sleeve of his jacket. At least he could breathe now. The blanket of smoke which had choked the boy as he led the cattle out of the barn had now lifted. Danny wondered how his father, Shug, had managed to get all the equipment out of the barn. He had seen him repeatedly dash into the burning building, despite the anxious warnings of the firemen. The boy spotted his father now, perched atop the seat of the big green combine he had driven out of the inferno.

Shug Jordan slumped back into the charred seat of the combine and wiped the sweat from his brow with the sweep of his cap. It was the same cap he had worn twenty-one years ago, when he had helped his father build the barn. Now he clutched the tattered green feed cap in despair, as he watched the building he had sweated and toiled in for so many years crumble into smoke and ash. What more could a man do? He had gotten all the machinery out of the barn, and Danny had led all twenty-three head of Holstein cattle into the far end of the barn lot. But the hay crop was completely lost, as well as several bins of grain sorghum. The big farmer raised his blackened hands to his face, a weatherbeaten countenance creased with the furrows of his profession.

The fire had subsided; its dull roar now replaced by the slow whine of the dying embers. Danny ran to the combine and scrambled up to the seat. He clutched his father by the shoulder.

"Pa, it's Fuzzy. He got scared an' broke loose an' now he's in the corn field! What'll we do?"

Shug Jordan looked at the grim expression on his son's face and laughed, putting a big arm around the little boy's shoulder. He had lost a barn, but he could laugh. He had his tractor, his fields, and his son. They'd make out.

"We'll let ol' Fuzz chew on the corn fer tonight, Danny," he said, with a tired grin. "He's on the bony side, anyhow."

With that, he tossed the old green feed cap on his son's head and helped him off the combine. Wiping the grease from his charred hands, the big farmer trudged slowly back to the house.

A Tom Swifty

Sandra Long

"Hello, Mr. Vonnegut," he said curtly.

"We have to read *Moby Dick*!" he wailed.

"We will all die someday," the minister said gravely.

## REFLECTIONS OF LOVE

Randy Lee

Interlaced with pictures of what was above  
There were, in the pool, reflections of love.  
To test their strength I threw a stone,  
And when the ripples had ceased, I was there alone.



WILLIAM WORDSWORTH and MATTHEW ARNOLD  
PRAY

Sherry Gamble

"Here are your waters and your watering place.  
Drink and be whole again beyond confusion."  
—Robert Frost, in "Directive"

a sea of faith  
a barren land  
a thankless race  
beached on a strand

Oh Proteus, woo thy lady in the moon anew  
that she may tug the tide until  
our arid land  
our shards of faith  
are bathed again  
with life-giving dew, with foam, with fog which  
clouds the mind but leaves the sense refreshed

shock us with waves, with floods, with cold wet slaps  
salted, seeded with belief  
dash our doubt on the reef of reason  
and let us be whole  
beyond confusion



## JIMMY SEED—A REAL SEEDY GUY

Karen Greene

Jimmy Seed sat on his handmade tapestry rug in his army issue jeans munching on his own home-grown yogurt from an earthen pottery jar. The corner of his "return to nature" type apartment was kept somewhat like a shrine, for it was there that his stereo stood on a wicker stand under his Peter Max poster. Ancient cithara music was frequently heard mingling down the hall along with the scent of curry, frying mushrooms, and another obvious sweet odor. Anything unusual in the apartment was always associated with Jimmy Seed.

Jimmy Seed was an accomplished zither player who had hitchhiked to California from Iowa several years back. After graduating with a degree in agronomy, Jimmy found that he was fed up with "watching the corn grow" and decided to go off on his own to try to make it with his zither. Life seemed like paradise for a while. He met a group of underground writers who really dug the zither and provided him with some great publicity. Jimmy became a regular at the Sunflower, a coffeehouse frequented by local arty types. He was a fun, free-loving guy who could get along with anyone. Disappointment followed when Jimmy found that this society didn't believe in paying in currency and he was therefore paid in sunflower seeds. Feeling defeated, Seed picked up his zither and headed for a new surrounding where he'd be appreciated. This is still his goal in life today.

The glassy brown-eyed musician can be found every day sitting on his tapestry rug. He plays his zither from 11:00, when he gets up, until 3:00. His only break is lunch when he munches on his own cultured yogurt and eats a few berries. "Someday," he says, "someone will come to appreciate me and my zither."

"The preciousness lies in the lonely mind of a man."

—John Steinbeck,  
East of Eden

## SHADES OF GRAY

Eric Anderson

... That was our last summer. After that we grew up fast: no time to wonder about things, only time enough to decide. And with everything moving so quickly, decisions made one minute got reversed by decisions made the next. So you couldn't really do anything that was right or wrong; you just did things. I wish it could be the way John says it was in the beginning—light against darkness. But it isn't simple anymore. I remember only one simple thing about growing up, and that part doesn't seem to fit.

The stream ran muddy that August. The rain that washed the dirt in was making it flow bigger and faster, too. The rapids were still white and in the shallow pools it was hardly noticeable because you could still see every pebble on the bottom. But in the deep pools the water looked brown where any other year the light would have gone right down into it.

The rapids were right under the bridge. The bridge is set right on the banks, but the banks are so high there that standing on the bridge, you could spit and count to two before it hit. You couldn't see it hit the surface, because of the rapids. But you could tell one moment it was there and the next it wasn't.

Upstream the banks are as high and so steep they're almost perpendicular to the surface of the water. They are widened out a little, though, and the stream is very deep there. At the top of the bank on one side are some big trees that hang half-way over the water. But the top of the other bank is flat and grassy. We'd drive out and spend the day lots of times; it was quiet there, and pretty. We'd bring a lunch and eat, then lie around on the grass in the sun and nap or shoot the bull or whatever. And of course with the swimming hole right there, that place had just about everything.

The last time we went up we weren't even going to go in swimming because the water was so muddy. But the day kept getting hotter and the water was looking better and better. So finally Phillip says "the hell with it," takes off his shirt and sneakers and jumps in. It didn't take Don and me half a minute to do the same.

I'll never forget how it felt just jumping in because the air was so hot and the water so cold, being mostly rain. Going from all-hot one

minute to all-cold the next makes you giddy somehow and I had to swim across and hold onto the bank until it subsided a little.

Then Phil says he's got an idea and disappears toward the car. He comes back across the bridge carrying the tow-rope from the trunk and climbs up one of those trees above me that hang over the water.

"I been meaning to do this," he yells down. "But I never had the ambition."

He ties one end of the rope in the tree and lets the other end drop. The end of the rope hangs just above the surface of the water.

"Perfect," I tell him.

Phil goes first.

When he swings it looks almost like slow-motion camera because it's only the force of his own weight against the angle of the rope that's carrying him out over the water. When he's half-way over he lets go. The invention is a success.

I want to get some more swing out of the rope, so I take hold a ways down and jump down toward the water. The jolt from the slack coming out of the rope jerks the rope out of my hands. I fall into the water about three feet from the bank.

Don's improvement on the system is to take hold even farther down than I did and get a running start. He has a tight hold, too, so the rope won't come out of his hands. When he gets out over the water he's just a blur, he's moving so fast.

I don't know why he didn't let go. If he'd have let go then we would have just gone home like any other day. Maybe he didn't really have time or he wasn't thinking or wasn't watching. Maybe he was scared.

But he didn't let go and his body smacked almost flat against the wall of the bank. He fell backwards into the water and he didn't come up.

Me and Phil go right in after him, but the water is so muddy we can't see a thing. We'd go under and lose our direction and didn't know if we were checking places we already checked or what. Once we both come up for air at the same time and Phil says we better get help. There's a village down the road that has an emergency van. Phil goes because he's the better driver and I'm still looking for Don.

I found him. I knew before I found him that it was too late. But I tried everything. I picked him up by the heels and let some water drain out of his lungs. I pressed on his back and on his chest. I tried mouth-to-mouth. I know I was doing it right because I learned how in health



class at school. But it didn't work. Nothing worked.

Phil got back with the emergency van and they said there was nothing to be done. I looked at Don once and looked away. I guess all the time I was working on him I hadn't really looked at him.

We never went back and I don't think either one of us even mentioned going up again because it just didn't feel right. When I'm remembering all the times up at the stream I try to keep that last time separate . . .

### SHALL I KISS YOU WHEN?

Gabriel Gaylord

Shall I kiss you when?  
The stars descend and angels come  
To wipe thy face of tears, those  
Drops of starlit crystals  
Human eyes have never seen.  
And mother to her child doth say,  
"Of Aristotle's love and joy  
Which is greater little boy?"  
Shall I kiss you when?  
The moonlight is a pleasant blue  
When night elopes with you  
Making room for an ocean voyage—  
Enduring jungle fevers just when I see  
An outline of your face implying harmony,  
The fever's gone the love so strong  
No longer am I all alone.



## WAITING IN THE WEEDS

Jeff Paul

Davidson and Robbin fished along the bank in the day, now that spring and high water had come. The warmer, deeper waters swelled with the largest and most abundant fish of the year, and fishermen of this temperate land lost nothing by staying ashore and catching the fish that fed from the nearby weedline. Mr. Davidson fished the weedline for bass, splendid, prize-winning largemouth that always outshone but never outweighed Mr. Robbin's quarry. Robbins chased what he called "porkers," the largest catfish in the freshwaters of America and perhaps ecologically the most damaging scavengers—muddy, unattractive giants called "flatheads."

"You can fish for them women fish," said Mr. Robbin, stepping behind Davidson's pier. At the dock's end, Davidson swore at his empty hook. Mr. Robbin added, "One of my porkers'll make eight of your fairy fish."

"Yeh, and when was the last time you caught one of your goddam porkers?"

Bothered, Robbin baited his hook with shad entrails and thought for a moment. "You know I'm only kidding you, Davey . . . Good Luck," he said.

"Same."

This was routine. No fishermen were fishermen if they didn't give each other "shit" and give it constantly. And Davidson did not mind it. Only once, in fact, had he avoided his river buddies and their cackling teasing for an extended period. As he recalled, that spell was during that Mrs. Majors thing . . .

Mrs. Majors once lived to Davidson's north (Robbin lived to the south,) and every morning Davidson's awakening sight would be her, kneeling in a small fountain. There, she fed and teased her pet tropical fish: an odd hobby, Davidson had thought while he leaned upon the chipping window sill. Still, he would watch in mystery this woman he loved in a distant way, in an admiring, and yet protective way. He watched until the curtains' dust choked him.

Mrs. Majors had orange hair. Mrs. Majors had magnetically blue eyes, the blue so rich Davidson always imagined taking a fish hook, pricking her eyeballs with the point, and watching blue liquid run down

her cheeks. And even when he did that to her, he fantasized, she would still smile and bounce with that spicy invitation written in the eyes, and then she would smile primly, telling him she was forbidden, Do Not Touch. Every time he saw her, the encounter came to that message: "I am open to everyone,," she seemed to say, "with everything I have, except the physical love, the one and only thing my husband cherishes."

More, however, than mere personality and physical beauty attracted Mr. Davidson to her. What was that extra attraction? Was it love; was it that satiable hungry love that comes from laughing and feeling natural with someone who touches him every way but physically? Finally, after years of knowing Mrs. Majors, he realized that it *was* that unique love they shared. Davidson first recognized the communion one Saturday afternoon when, as he wandered past a small woods, the woman sprang out at him from the weeds and began laughing wildly. Laughing, not with him, but *at* him. She had startled him but, instead of patronizing him with an "Oh, you're still stronger than I" reaction, laughed while he shuddered. Yet, when Davidson would say or do something funny, she did laugh with him. Like the colors of a chameleon, her emotions changed naturally and truthfully, and with each moment of proven reality, Mrs. Majors warmed Davidson. Warmed—not burned; once he had grown to know her fully, he no longer throbbed for a quick backdoor bang with the neighbor woman. Instead, he did things like awake upon hungover Sunday mornings and cure himself by opening the window and watching his lady-in-the fountain.

Somehow, she would always know he watched. And wherever nearby he went, it seemed, she would be there, and, eventually, the sassy, but polite message would come. She popped up everywhere Davidson looked or walked, perplexing him, for he wanted at once to tell everyone about her and keep her a secret. He wanted to pursue her, but that would be unnatural. Just follow your daily path, he told himself, and she'll come naturally. And once he knew the rules of this game, he hated them, but prayed the game would never end—because of that warmth just above the abdomen, because it all felt good, loving this woman. The way *he* loved her.

Mrs. Majors died in a shocking mishap. Those who had not seen it happen never fully understood, Davidson included: it was something about the boat coming in to dock, striking something, a cable coming loose, and Mrs. Majors literally being whipped into the deep channel.

Something like that, Davidson recalled. No matter, they didn't find her; it was hard to imagine her dead . . .

"Never catch any porkers out there," a voice said from upstream.

"It's been known to happen. Anyway—" Davidson said, "I don't want one."

"Everybody wants one."

"Balls. You do because you've been lucky enough to have a couple swim to your feet."

"Ain't luck," Robbin said warningly. Then he laughed. "Yes-sir, that's quite a knack. You gotta know how to play them suckers so they'll swim to you."

"And how's that, Captain Quint?"

"Logic. Fish swims away he feels your pull. Swims side to side, don't feel anything. But most people's so damn dumb they keep pulling when the thing's running sideways. But if you don't pull, like me, there's a chance the fish will dart right to you, 'cause he don't know where you are."

"What keeps him from just seeing you?" Davidson said.

"You'll learn that a fish swims leisurely and sees. He *fishes* blind; one that's big does, anyway."

"Hmmm. I bet they buck like the hell when they're that fresh laying on the bank."

"Oh, shit. Saw one knock a guy into the river one time." Robbin laughed again, this time cackling. "Uppity man. Glad to see it happen . . . No, you've got to have a gun or something."

"Can't you stun him with a hammer?" Davidson asked.

"You gotta kill him. There's no point in just stunning him. Saw one guy, same guy, in fact, stun a sixty pounder and try to keep him caged."

"What happened?"

"It was time for a new cage—that's what happened."

Both men laughed. Davidson dropped his pole to the pier and walked up to his cabin. Inside the dark shelter, he stretched and limbered out the kinks in his legs and lower back. He took a six-pack of beer from the refrigerator and returned to the hot sun. Stumbling down the slope, he saw Mr. Robbin staggering about the brush and cursing something.

"You're hung up again," Davidson teased.

"Nossir," said Robbin, ". . . Nossir. It's a perch." Perch were Robbin's favorite food fish, except for the cleaning of them. Silver-gray



and roundish, the soft-boned perch die quickly once caught and this lack of durability, just the opposite of catfish, means the fish have to be cleaned very soon after they are caught.

"How big is he?" Davidson tried to spot the fish through the surface glare.

"Three pounds, I'd guess." Robbin lunged further out into the weeds to guide the fish away from the pier barrels. "Here he comes."

The fish came up a silvery flash and disappeared. Robbin felt the line go slack, and he stood still amid his own torrent and waited to see if the fish was swimming toward him. But after a moment of watching the glassy water, he snarled in disgust and reeled in his empty hook.

Trying not to laugh, Davidson frowned and watched for a storm—Robbins had busted as many as five fishing rods in a day, in frustration. But the red-faced fisherman turned to Davidson and laughed. "Don't matter," he said, beaming at Davidson, "it was your fish, anyway."

"Huh?" Davidson looked closer at Robbin and saw that it was *his* pole Robbin had been using. Then Robbin pointed to a tree on the bank. Focusing his eyes to the shade, Davidson saw Mr. Robbin's huge jayhawker pole secured between the branches of a tree. The black line swirled in a small eddy fifteen feet offshore.

"It's just waiting for one of my big black babies to come up and grab it," said Robbin. He pitched Mr. Davidson's casting rod onto the bank and hoisted himself onto a row of steel cables, strung from the bank to the pier's end. Robbin bounced playfully.

Disturbed, Davidson eyed him and picked up the pole and a handful of shad guts with it.

"Yessir," Robbin said, staring off to the north, "that'll do you good. Just throw it out into the channel and you can catch yourself a string of blues or channels or bullheads or anything you want." He pulled the farmer's cap from his head and scratched through his thinning red hair. A powerfully large man when he had first arrived upon the river, Mr. Robbin had since weakened, slumped. He retained only the boyish enthusiasm, the childish temper, all the emotional vigor that made him Mr. Robbin—the salt from Boston who came inland for good. Still, it was not enthusiasm, but disappointment that brought him in. Disappointment, from the diminished returns from the efforts of one man, and just one man, as many of Robbin's boatmates had



grown weary of their daily fishing long before he had. They beached themselves, and, alone, Mr. Robbin lost the concentration and desire necessary for a successful catch. he moved to the river, and each "porker" represented a thousand lost days on the sea. If I were to catch enough here, he subconsciously knew, then maybe all those lost days would be made up for.

He put the cap back on, looked out to sea, and said, "Yessir."

Davidson baited his hook and cast the spraying meat out toward the fast channel. But the line caught, leaving the reel and the bait backlashed to just beyond the weedline. Trying to free it from the reel, Davidson tugged at the line.

"Too short," said Robbin.

"It backlashed," said Davidson, still tugging and looking inside the reel. "Screw it—I'll just let it float."

"No good—"

"Don't worry about it," he snapped, frustrated from Robbin's constant coaching. He placed the butt of the rod in its holder and knelt, his back to the onlooking Robbin. He glanced at his line and saw that it had slacked too greatly, wrapping itself among the surface weeds. To increase the tension, Davidson carried the casting rod back to the bank and secured it within a mental footrest. He looked to Robbin, who rolled his eyes.

Moving toward the pier, Mr. Robbin reached upward, grabbed Davidson's line, and lifted it free of the surface brush. The white monofilament line slid down a reed and settled onto the surface. "Now you're fishing," he said.

The line sagged next to Robbin and flattened out at the weedline, the bait sinking to a point a few inches above the muddy bottom.

As Mr. Robbin moved back to his own station, Davidson lay next to the footrest and looked skyward. Where are the clouds today? he thought. That day Mrs. Majors jumped from the weeds, the sky and the clouds were unlike any he had ever seen: the real light blue sky had become shielded by a new, slightly darker sky, and the new clouds formed into giant smooth yellow strips, radiating an otherworldly beam. The ominous ray held many colors, each visible from a different point of view, and its light changed the colors of the Earth—the gray road turned blue, the browning grass bright green, the black water deep purple, the dust yellow. Mrs. Majors' hair was blood red that day. And yet, even though the unique weather thrilled Davidson, Mrs. Majors—and the new sensitivity she yielded from him—outshone the

ray. Indeed, he remembered her more vividly than the unforgettable skies; perhaps, *she* was the only reason he remembered those skies at all.

Mr. Davidson settled into the brown grass and began daydreaming of the little fish in the fountain and how he would trade a million three pound perch for one of them. Drowsing, he felt himself soak into the scenery. His legs flowed easily with the river. His back dug into the earth. His stomach felt the heat of the day, and the rest of him—his chest and face—phased into the sky. He slept.

Only a second later, it seemed, he heard Robbin's voice, first *only* the voice, then the words. "She's flyin'! She's flyin', Christ!" Davidson jerked upright, leapt to his feet, and lunged for his rod, which had already pulled free from the stand and was sliding off the bank. He dove for it and missed.

Robbin tore through the water to save the pole. The rod tipped once on the slope, dropped into the waves, and began twisting out to sea. Robbin stumbled through a clump of weed and slammed his hand into the water.

He pulled out the clutching hand, and in it were grass, mud and rock, and amid them all, Davidson's grimy rod. Spitting mud and spanking dirt from his pants, Davidson leapt into the river beside Robbin—who turned the line control to RELEASE and dumped the water from the reel. The waves were a storm from Robbin's chase and Davidson's jumping in. Otherwise, there was no turmoil: whatever was on the other end of the line moved silently, inexorably, and—to Davidson—tauntingly away. Robbin handed him the rod and said, "I believe he's your bass."

Breathless, Davidson held the rod still and could feel the steady, heavy drive of the fish. But he knew that this thing was not a black bass; it not only moved too slowly to be a bass, but, most obviously, it was much bigger and stronger. He looked to the reel handle and saw that it was spinning as smoothly, as freely, as was the great fish. Excitement numbing his legs, he stepped further into the river—into the weeds, where, ordinarily, a dozen feeding fish would have shot away upon his splashing arrival. But none were there to shoot away this time.

"You better make sure you've got that hook in him," Robbin said. "He could be just swimming with it."

Shaken beyond control and concentration, Davidson looked at Robbin blankly and then back toward the invisible force.

"Hit him," Robbin said.



Suddenly aroused, Davidson held the line tight to the rod and jerked the pole upward powerfully. He couldn't raise the pole. With the hook already imbedded in it, the power moved too strongly to relent. Instead of the rod bending in a picturesque arc, it began to pull straight from Davidson's hands. Then, Davidson felt the true power of what he had hooked. It was a force, he knew, that seemed not only to have the power to pull him across the river, but also the awesomeness, the gravity, to crush him. Panicking and fumbling, Davidson released the line and regained his grip on the rod.

The line moved faster from the reel now. It hissed. Accelerating, it whined and threw off tiny water beads.

"What do I do?" Davidson said, frenzied. "What can I do?"

Puzzled, Robbin forgot his own station and plodded toward Davidson.

"He's running me out," Davidson said. The reel handle spun eerily, accelerating like a centrifuge. "Goddam, what do I do?"

"Give it here," Robbin said, taking the rod from Davidson, who stepped back and spat. Davidson's biceps and shoulders were slightly weakened from when he had tried to jerk the rod upward.

Using his index finger, Robbin pinned the line to the rod, released it, pinned and released it again. "Heaviest thing I ever felt on this damn river," he said. Watching the spinning handle, then the quiet river, he said, "He might run us out and, if we're lucky, he might not. He's almost to the far bank now, but he may turn. How much line you got on here?"

"Less than a hundred yards."

"Then you better hope he turns."

But the driving force did not turn. Instead, it stopped, and lay still. The whining had stopped, and Robbin looked to the water and then to the reel handle, which eased to a slow spin, shifted eerily once, and held still. "He quit," Robbin said.

"He's off?"

"No. He's gone to the bottom." He returned the rod to Davidson's unwilling hands. "Now here's what you do: you pull up on that thing. Not slow and steady, but quick and hard—jerk it up and then ease off."

"Why?"

"It's the only way you can move him and get him to come back your way."

"I'm not so sure I want him to come back," said Davidson. He

grabbed a pier support and hoister himself onto one of the barrels. From there, he slid onto the pier, and once, just as he put a knee onto the wooden top, he felt the immovable tension on the line. He rose slowly and slumped with the butt of the pole held squarely at his stomach.

"Now do what I said," Robbin yelled, moving southward along the bank, "and I'll come up with a boat from the docks. Who knows, we might get the black bastard."

Who knows, Davidson mocked to himself. He's going to the docks at the camp, and he'll get either that little motorboat, and we'll chase this thing *just* to see it, or his pontoon and, if the thing is slow, we'll try to catch it and slide it onboard. Lord, I don't think either will work.

He did as Robbin had said, snapping the pole up and lowering it again to his abdomen. The handle shifted ominously again, and, for the first time, something happened at the water's surface: more than two hundred feet out, beyond the channel, a great swirl altered the surface; in an area of about fifteen feet square, the river moved clockwise, then counterclockwise. And slowly, as Mr. Robbin had hoped, the line began to slide aimlessly along the surface, back toward the pier and Davidson. Davidson froze.

And for the first time, he felt frightened. It was not painful fright, however, nor was it a great fear. It was an anxious kind of fear. He did not think the thing would burst through the surface and devour him. He did not fear for his safety at all. Still, watching the line swirl peculiarly through the small waves, Davidson felt the grip of something unnatural and had the desire, the need, to finish the adventure now. But not by escape, not by running a universe away, the shortest distance he would need to travel to lose that feeling gripping him. Although he did not know why, he would have to unmask that thing beneath the surface . . . yes, it all came to that. That is what must be done to remove an alien emotion that, although not an agony, will not just go away—ever. The emotion will build and build and, eventually, take over every other emotion. Simply cutting the line—an escape, in effect—can not exorcise the emotion. The question must be answered.

And then, the possibility—the strong possibility—of the line being broken, or the "thing" pulling free from the hook, struck Davidson. The realization brought an irony: once, Mr. Robbin had left Davidson to hold one of his "porkers" the exact same way; then, Davidson *did* fear for his safety; then, Davidson needed for Robbin to hurry back to



his aid: then, Davidson wished the thing would break free. This time, however, Robbin's hasty return was, although far less blatant than for physical safety, to save Davidson from a deeper misery, invisibly vast.

Davidson watched the thing slide, tighten, and swirl crazily across the surface. This sight increased the alien fear.

Something huge popped up next to him. He jumped to his left and looked to the right, where the thing had showed. It was not next to him, but rather far in the distance to the right. It was Robbin captaining his pontoon at only two knots, the motor quietly humming. Robbin held his finger to his mouth and smiled broadly, as if saying "shhh," careful not to scare the big black bastard. Focusing expertly upon the water, Robbin spotted the line moving across the waves and turned his boat toward the bank. He shut off the engine and let the boat float.

Holding the rod under his left arm, Davidson raised his right and mouthed, "What do I do now?"

Robbin stepped out from under the sun roof onto the open deck and summoned him with a sweep of his hand. He then moved his hands as if feeding line from a reel—signalling Davidson to make sure he did not create unnecessary tension upon the line.

Cautiously, Davidson walked to the back of the pier. Feeding line as he went, he soon was on board with Robbin, and both men, perplexed, looked out upon the mystery. "Look, we've got miles of slack out there," said Davidson. "It could get tangled up in something."

"The dumbest thing we could do right now is reel it up, because then all the fish would need is one tug and he'll be gone for good. You won't get him to come back next time."

"So what are we going to do?"

Robbin sat at a table under the roof and stared into the water beside the boat. Small waves slid lightly into the boat. "We'll let him swim until he decides to show himself and then we'll kill him someday." He pointed to a shotgun and a bow and arrow that lay on the floor. Next to them was an open cooler full of beer and ice.

"We're going to get him drunk?"

"No dumass. The weapons there." Robbin shook his head and tried again to spot the fish. The line lay in so many huge coils on the surface that it was impossible for him to know exactly where the fish was. Still more mysteriously, one of the giant coils occasionally would stand up and fall over, without straightening. Then several coils would slide across the surface together, try to intermingle, bob with the waves, and slide another way.

Robbin and Davison looked at each other. With the line run out in all directions, the force might have been beneath the boat—one big coil floated at the near starboard side. Yet, it might have been beyond the weedline, for the line lay there too. Robbin ducked beneath the pole and stepped to the stern, and he pulled the motor up and out of the sandy shallow. As water streamed from the still blades, Robbin said, "If this baby's in shape we'll be ready for a little Cat and Mouse."

The rod propped up on the railing, Davidson knelt and shut off the release, securing the line in the reel. No need to let him sneak all the line out, he thought. "Have we got a full tank?" he said.

"Yes sir, that we have, and a can-full on board." Robbin grabbed a cloth and wiped clean the blades. Then, feeling the boat's bottom scraping the sand, he yelled, "Woops! We're in too close. Hop back here and help we slide us out, Davey."

Davidson leaned the pole to the railing and hurried to the stern, where he crouched under the railing and dropped into the shallow by Robbin.

"OK, here we go."

Robbin tried at once to lift and push. Pushing with his head down, Davidson saw a large coil bump against Robbin's leg. The boat eased from the sand and Robbin, gripping a rail, rested and laughed to Davidson, who pointed to the coil and said, "Look."

Robbin saw it and shook his head.

"Scary, isn't it?" whispered Davidson.

As Robbin nodded and laughed in amazement, another giant coil leapt up at the pier's end. Suddenly, the coil flattened into a boomerang shape, and the one by Robbin pulled away smoothly, quickly. The men watched as every coil jumped once, straightened, and began swimming in a monstrous arc that began at the boat, bent toward the pier, out into the channel, downstream, and back toward the boat.

"What's happening!"

"Get on board," said Robbin as the giant arc began to feed below the surface ten feet from the boat. Scrambling aboard, Robbin dove for the rod, bending, its reel screaming. Davidson clawed at the railing and fell aboard behind Robbin.

"Jesus Christ! Why'd you tighten it?" Robbin cried.

Davidson ran to the railing and stood next to Robbin, who fed the sweeping arc as rapidly as he could. Robbin brought the pole around a horizontal rail, then another, to keep the line from tangling beneath



the boat. The force, whatever it was, was gliding beneath the boat. A frighteningly large wake lifted the boat, and Robbin cried, "We can't be in five feet of water! See him! See him!"

Davidson stumbled to the stern and looked into the strange turbulence. But there was a fog of mud so thick he could not even see the still blades of the motor. "I can't see it!"

"Look again—he has to be there."

Davidson squeezed shut his eyes and opened them. He tried mentally to filter out the mud and perceive only the force sweeping past. He saw, he imagined, a shadow dart by and nothing after. He blinked and looked again. "I can't see what it is."

"Did you see it at all." Robbin pinned the rod to his chest and, following the moving junction of line and water, tried to spot the fish below. The sweeping arc was continuing, he saw, and retracing its course: again, the line swept downstream before the boat, turned and arched inward—at the boat. "Come here," Robbin said to Davidson. "You hold this sucker and let me look."

Davidson squeezed the rod as had Robbin. Crouching to Davidson's left, Robbin fixed his eyes upon the water, upon the top waves, into the waves beneath them, into the upset current below those waves. With his head beneath the railing and his hands gripping the railing, he waited.

The boat seemed to slide for an instant, and, again, it rose with the giant wake. Robbin crouched and followed, crouched and followed, the sweeping line to the stern. "Nothing! Goddammit," he cried.

Just then, a power greater than any Robbin had experienced slammed the outboard motor out of the water in an explosion of water and mud and agonizing sound—a loud metallic ring mixed with crunching. The motor splashed back into the water. The line moved back out to sea.

Cursing, Robbin knelt at the stern and hoisted the motor from the water. "We're luckier than hell," he said. "The bastard must've hit the bottom harder than the motor—"

"Will it still run?"

But before an answer came, the air filled with another sound—a scream at first, rising into a very high, echoing, yet sighing wail. It had started somewhere in the offing, moved to the air above the river, and swelled frighteningly. It might have come from an animal, a bird, perhaps the lucky soprano of a large farm animal. But to Davidson, the sound could be related only to the power making the arc on the water.

As the line swept across the channel, he watched it. And that was all involved—the line streaming, Davidson's face, the line streaming, Davidson's stupefied expression, the line streaming, Davidson's sweating face. The line streaming away.

"And Away We Go!" a voice said from somewhere and something jolted Davidson. And soon wind blew his hair, water rose and flew at his sides, and the river skipped beneath him. "The race is on!" the voice said, laughing, coming closer.

The boat made a turn, and Davidson discovered that he was walking toward the bow, onto the open sun deck. The railing there was only a foot above the deck, and that hazard plus the fact that the railing was open at the bow's exact center, meant danger for a standing passenger.

"Wake up Davey," said Robbin. "Take a seat."

Davidson eased into a patio chair, and Robbin steered the boat at the stern, beneath the orange roof.

"You scream if he stops on us, Davey!" he yelled. "Don't wanna run over the bastard." Robbin accelerated to fifteen knots and ran to Davidson, both men trying to spot where the line burrowed into the waves. "Can you still feel him?" said Robbin.

"I don't know." Although he was now more alert than moments before, Davidson could no longer sense the force on the other end, whether it was struggling, if it even knew it was hooked.

Robbin ran to the back and increased the speed to seventeen knots. Still, they did not gain. The line remained taut, without great pressure, making the force seem adaptable to the boat's speed, as if it were operated by some strange mechanism, some instinct, that kept it always the same distance ahead.

"Now you tell me whatever that thing does," said Robbin. "I don't want to break him off by some dumb mistake."

"Neither do I," said Davidson, rising and stepping toward the front railing. He wanted to see it, that was all. Just see it. If it were in fact a fish, if he saw a dorsal fin, the flat black tail of a "porker," then he would be satisfied. But the thing on the other end would not let that happen; it kept just out of reach, just beyond vision.

"Faster," Davidson said.

"I don't know." Robbin pushed forward the throttle to MAXIMUM, and the boat jumped, accelerating little. "Shit."

"We'll never get her," Davidson whispered.



Suddenly, the line swept to the right of the boat and headed for the south shore. The line tautened and rose and, as one climatic swell filled Davidson and Robbin, the surface trembled. The men would see it.

But suddenly, the river became smooth again where the line had risen, not as when the weather calms, but as if a giant hand had failed to wipe clean an error. The line borrowed again, and the force drilled to the river's bottom.

Davidson felt the agony a child feels when he pulls a big fish within inches of the bank and then loses it. Although he had not lost the fish, Davidson felt the opportunity would not return. For the first time since age seven, he wanted to cry from disappointment. Feeling a different frustration, Robbin slammed the railing and looked, mouth open in anger and disbelief, to Davidson, who returned no answer. Robbin threw his fist into the throttle so hard that the lever fell to SLOW. Damaged by the mistreatment, the engine coughed and blew out blue smoke. The boat turned about.

"Feel him yet?" said Robbin, watching the aimless course of the line. The line seldom slacked now, as the force knew it had been hooked and was acting instinctively.

"This thing's either too big or just too strong to move," Davidson sighed.

"We can tire him, surface him, pull up to him, and slide him on. Nothing's too strong," said Robbin.

"For a fly rod?"

"Just give him line when he wants it and let him swim his ass tired."

"It's not going to work, because this thing can swim for a month . . . I don't think it's one of your 'porkers,' old Robby," he said.

"You're screwed—what else would he be? Just too big for anything else, but a sturgeon. We don't get sturgeon here."

"I didn't say I knew what it was. I'm just saying—"

The rod bent into a half-circle. "Oh shit. She's doing something," Davidson said, half-laughing.

"Hit the release." Robbin jumped up and grabbed the shotgun. "He's headed under us. I don't know how deep he'll be when he passes us, but I might get lucky if I just pop one down there with this thing."

"You're going to shoot blind without even seeing what it is I've hooked?" Davidson felt cold rush up his neck, then the same at the small of his back.

"Won't matter. Anything this big is just a worthless scavenger." He leaned over the railing and peered into the brown water, smeared with blue and yellow beacons of sunlight. The beacons flashed, disappeared, and flashed somewhere else. Robbin smelled cleanliness in the water out this far; at shore, dirt mixed with the water smell.

Davidson held the rod tightly to his side as the line moved slowly from side to side toward the boat. Now, the pole not only bent greatly, but it also bobbed with the rising and falling of the force—within twenty feet of the boat.

"This'll be easy," Robbin said, leaning upon the railing with the shotgun and rocking anxiously. He smiled.

The line moved within ten feet of the boat, and Davidson tightened his sweating grip. "Try to see it first," he whispered.

"I will."

Robbin peered through the surface. He saw nothing, but said, "There it is," and he fired the shotgun. The water exploded, and for an instant the men could see the lead shot burrowing into the depth. The rod bent so greatly its tip dipped into the water and scraped the boatside beneath the surface. The force thrust downward with its greatest strength and, with a final burst, the rod snapped upward, throwing Davidson, and all the tension was gone. Davidson stumbled into the other railing and fell onto his back. Stunned, his head hanging out over the water, he looked up to his wide-eyed companion, who bent and picked up the rod.

"Broke it," Robbin said. He looked back to the starboard side; he was so hypnotized by the rocking waves he scarcely noticed that something was cutting his thumb. When he finally looked to his hand, he saw blood—and the line still running out. "Hey! It's still feeding!" he yelled, half-stunned, yet laughing with new joy.

Davidson pulled himself up by the railing and staggered. Rasping, he said, "She didn't break it?"

"He just stripped it. See, it's still going."

Davidson took the pole and watched the line flee the reel in tiny oscillations. Robbin ran to the open deck and secured the anchor rope to the steel rail and dropped anchor. "Now we'll stay put," he said to himself.

He bounded back to beneath the roof and looked back out to sea. "Where's he swimming?" he said.

"I can't tell. He's too far below the surface."



"Hand it here," Robbin said, reaching out, but with his eyes still fixed upon the waves. He took the rod by the reel and tightened the drag, to prevent any more line from stripping away, and then hit the release. There was no slack now, but with the depth of the force, it was impossible to determine its exact angle and distance. And knowing this, Robbin realized there was little chance of even seeing the thing. It would continue away, swimming into a cold trench and remaining there, never to come up. Still, he did not want to tell Davidson or, for that matter, admit it aloud to himself, for it would mean spoiling the reprieve they had just gotten.

"Please stop," he said to the thing.

A moment later, it did slow and stop, but in a place Robbin had feared, a pit at least seventy feet deep. The line remained at the maximum tension, and the force moved no more.

Robbin stared toward the pit for several seconds, and finally handed the rod to Davidson. "I don't know," he said, "You could probably prop the pole on the rail here and take a rest—"

"Why?"

"It's sitting in that big hole and it's resting too. Just be sure there's nothing for that line to catch on, or we'll lose him for good."

Openmouthed, Davidson looked at Robbin and then the reel handle, still motionless. "Well," he said, "OK." He stood the pole against the rail, and the tip bent slightly. He checked to see that the line was not pinned to the rail, that the reel handle could spin freely, and that the line would come out of the reel freely. He stood and checked everything again and sat at a table beside the encased onboard engine.

Robbin sat and rested on the deck, with one leg bent and the other stretched out. Adjusting his cap, he blew out air and wiped the blood from his left thumb onto a rail bar. He looked thinner that way—he always stood, sat, and moved thinner in action. If he were on the bank, he would sit dumbly and look fat. But in chasing down a big fish, he assumed an athletic stature. He had limbered loose all the congregations of dormant muscles and meat, and he regained a little youth.

The sun was setting behind the west bank trees now, and slight overcast sealed most of the late afternoon sun. But, above the water, with the few penetrating rays cast across the surface, the gray ceiling appeared silver. In this special light, the dark parts of the surface, and the dark clothing of the men, grew darker. Meanwhile, the surface beacons and the men's flesh became illuminated and a shade brighter.

The right side of Davidson's face was yellow, the left dark. Robbin's face was all shadow right now as he faced eastward. The white fiberglass rod shone a little whiter and the water's surface, where the deep pit and the unseen force lay, was dark blue and brown; in two hours, all would be nearly black.

Now, however, there remained plenty light for the men to continue the chase. But there was no chase to be run until the line began moving, the force swimming, again. If it ever would move. The thing might have tangled the line in rocks or on a log, for the line showed no sign of life on the other end. This stillness puzzled Robbin, who had had many giant catfish swim into the depths, float suspended in the currents, and tire. But then, the line bobbed and shifted on the surface. Now, the line held still, as if snagged, but Robbin could tell by the line's slope that the thing had not gone deep enough to snag, unless something else floated down there, something else for the force to take refuge within.

At the table, Davidson followed the slope with his eyes and shook his head. "We'll never get it back," he said.

Again facing the eastern shadows, Robbin blew out air and sank into old age a little more. "I've never seen anything like this. It's just laying in those currents and won't come up." His face moved a little, and he said, "It'll tire out and come up."

Davidson forgot the line for an instant and watched just the water. His eyes brightened slightly. He licked away the dryness of his lips. Straightening, he eyed Robbin and, after a thought, said, "When was the last time you hooked something like this?"

"September. I think. Didn't fight like this, though. He just ran up the channel and down the channel and just kind of swam to me."

"You think this one will?" Davidson said.

But Robbin was still in September, thinking. And remembering, he said, "These people up here—especially those on the lake—thought they'd really seen a whale caught." He laughed a kind of disbelieving laugh and gazed at his thumb. "Shit. These people, they get their boats and their rigs all ready to hit the waves. They got their big docks all stretched out, boats side by side, like they are on the sea . . ."

Robbin paused and Davidson watched him.

"These lakes and rivers are like a toy compared to the real water. The camps they got up north on the lake got big marinas with your damned . . . tourist Sunday fishermen, trying to get their boat out of the harbor and into this muddy shit." He looked toward Mr. Davidson and quietly said, "Like they were really going to do something."



"Is this something?" Davidson said.

"... It's something."

The men waited for nearly an hour before the next action occurred. This time the rod bowed and eased up, bowed and eased, both men rising slowly and standing to each side of the pole. The line circled a swell in the pit and began to move gradually upstream.

"Just take it easy," said Robbin. "Let him play awhile."

Only the two faces above the railing and the white line, reaching to the swirl, shone in the dusk. The rest was a haze.

Suddenly the force accelerated, guiding the casting rod to the starboard/stern corner.

"Bring the rod around!" said Robbin.

Davidson swung the rod around the vertical rail with his left hand and grabbed it with his right. But the fish accelerated still, taking him to the port/stern corner and forcing him to make the exchange quicker. He nearly fumbled the rod, but kept up with the force.

The force had now half-circled the boat at a distance of 200 feet and was still speeding, heading downstream now. On the port side there were three vertical railings, and, cursing, sweating, Davidson passed the rod from hand-to-hand-to-hand-to-hand-to-hand-to-hand as quickly as he could open and lose each fist. He chased the force to the open deck and said aloud, "What if she does this again!"

Laughing, Robbin tried to answer, but he could not. The line was streaming straight downstream, never breaking momentum, and Davidson followed to the very end of the boat—where he had to stop; if jumping in could have helped, he would have jumped. He watched the line run.

Robbin moved to the deck and said, "All we can do is hope he turns around."

"But can't we chase it? Come on, let's get after her."

Mr. Robbin knelt by the railing and washed his hands in the river. "It would be a waste." Shaking dry his hands, he stood and said, "We take after it and it'll panic for sure. Remember, you're fighting this baby with a toothpick and dental floss. He'll either break you or just hide at the bottom. Our only hope is if he swims himself tired, and comes back to the boat."

The reel handle stopped. The men looked to it, then back downstream. "Wait a minute," Robbin said. The line lay still upon the flat surface for a moment; meanwhile, Robbin began moving everything on the deck—chairs, bait cans and buckets—to the main

floor beneath the roof.

"What are you doing?" Davidson's head darted around as he watched the line and Robbin at once.

"I've run them right up on the deck before. I just want to be ready, in case," he said.

The thought of *another* chance, and the thought of seeing the force, having it right there on the deck and sparkling in some kind of splendor, chilled Davidson. Again, he was anxious both in a thrilled way and in a scared way. Swallowing, he strained his eyes to sort line from foam, water from darkness. The line was slacking.

"It's either broken or she's coming back," Davidson said.

Holding the gun, Robbin walked to Davidson's left; he seemed to be mumbling to himself as he checked the chamber with a pencilsized flashlight.

"He's coming back," Robbin said aloud. Instead of slacking straight back toward the men, the line bowed greatly to the right, indicating to Robbin that the force was descending and swimming to their left. He closed the gun chamber and knelt beside Davidson, who shivered and yawned nervously. "Not going to sleep, are you. Davey?"

"Yeh. Sure."

The line bowed so greatly Robbin feared he would lose track of the force. He tapped Davidson on the leg and whispered. "Now reel just a little—but DON'T let him feel you." Then he whispered to himself, "Gotta get a gun on him."

Davidson cranked once, hesitated, cranked again.

"Enough."

The line headed almost straight down to below the boat, and moved slowly from side to side while still heading slightly left. "Ok, ease up," Robbin said. "In fact, don't even touch it . . . try to lean it here on the railing." He pointed to the low rail—only twelve inches above the deck—and said, "Slowly."

Davidson knelt before trying to lean the rod. He held the rod tightly at the butt with both hands, as if praying, and, fighting his greatest nervousness, he lowered the rod until he felt it contact the rail, and, gently, he placed the butt on the orange floor. He rose slowly, wobbling, and wiped his hands on his jeans.

"Why—" Too loud, "Why do you need the gun if we're gonna tire it out?" he said.

Robbin lay flat on his stomach now, with the gun next to him, its barrel over the water. He held up a hand and peered into the black



waves. He turned his face to Davidson. "We'll need to kill it anyway."

The rod's tip bobbed three feet above the surface and hypnotized Davidson. He thought of the magic he had felt during the last hours, of the emotions rising and falling inside him, of the confusion those emotions brought. He felt a rush of fear, from the possibility of a miracle. And then he thought of Robbin aiming a shotgun into the water. Feeling detached from everything, he said, "Oh."

The tip did not bow greatly, yet it danced crazily—and Davidson felt very nearly sure of the miracle. The tip began to rise as if the force would surface, then it dipped, and rose again. This movement continued until both men twisted in anxiety. "God," Robbin said, while Davidson turned and looked to the moon. Looking again to the rod, he whispered, "Don't shoot until you see it."

But Robbin didn't answer. Instead, he slid forward and looked from side to side, to the rod and into the water, to Davidson, to the shotgun, and seemingly everything at once. He said, "Here it comes."

The rod straightened, and the water boiled. The men tensed. Robbin slid back a little as the water's surface opened. Twenty feet away there was a great splash, the line jerked upward, and the pole shot off the railing into the water. The men dove desperately for it, with Davidson leaping head first into the railing and falling to the deck. Each man dropped his face to the deck and gasped.

They looked to the river but saw only black, and then each looked to the other. They breathed heavily, mutely. For a moment, each lay still and, in a rush, relived the excitement and the anticipation of the day and the suddenness of defeat. Each felt burned, disgusted, and worse, as if he had lost part of his life. Davidson knew why he felt that emotion; Robbin did not know the whole reason.

Fifty feet from the boat, the force splashed again. Seconds later, the third splash aroused the men, and Robbin reached for the flashlight. A fourth splash. A fifth. The sounds were coming at about fifteen second intervals and were tracking northward and toward the west bank. The sixth splash was almost directly west of the boat, and Robbin turned on the light.

"Keep it hidden," Davidson said to him.

Then the seventh splash came. The men slid around on the deck to face the northwest. They waited.

The eighth splash came, and the light beamed to the commotion. There were waves, and Davidson thought he had seen something move. More than a minute passed before the next splash brought the beam,



but the light missed again, and Robbin cursed, slapping the deck. He rose slowly and moved to the stern, stumbling over chairlegs as he went. Davidson knelt behind the deck partition and watched Robbin. Another splash and, quickly another. Robbin flashed the light and desperately waved the beam about the river.

"Can't find it!" he screamed.

One last splash sounded in the distance, and the men gave up.

Later, they walked from the docks to their cabins. Each walked with head down, Robbin several steps ahead of Davidson. Davidson would have been positive of the miracle if it weren't for a contradiction that grew apparent quickly. The action of the fishing line had been miraculous, and there had been a special, spiritual pressure from the start, but, there was something wrong in the entire chase: and there lay the point; it *had been* a chase. Why had not the force appeared? Why had it been determined to taunt, yet hide? Of course no fish would behave that way, but neither would anything Davidson had known.

Confusion remained. That night, both men slept hungrily, Robbin dreaming of the sea, Davidson of the fish in the fountain.

"Maybe it's hard to believe in me in times like these, but if you had faith to start with, maybe the times would change. Maybe it would help to know I believe in you."

—God,  
played by George Burns, in "Oh God!"

## THE SHROUD

Anonymous

The shroud was nowhere near the corpse of little Jane Jones.  
It enveloped us as we sat in somber silence, trying to remember how  
Jane talked or

laughed or  
cried or  
lived.

We couldn't remember, though, and so Jane died again.  
She wasn't Jane or Janie or "honey" or friend—  
She was a name on a stone lost among other names on stones.

So we cried—not for Jane or Janie or a little girl, but for  
Death (and ourselves).





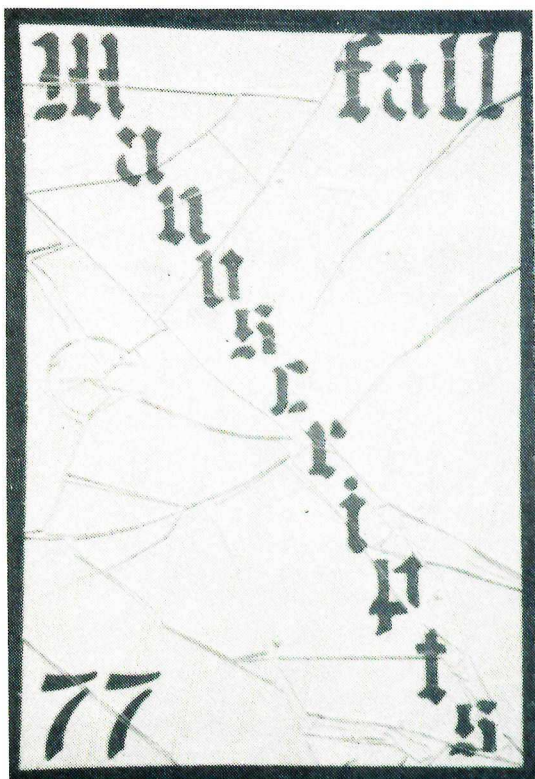
## OPENING MY MIND...

Elizabeth Chace

Opening my mind only big enough  
to let you crawl in  
and experience  
Only what I can feel.  
Thru the cobwebs of old emotions  
I had once thought were dead  
Seeing some barely alive  
Killing some  
and caressing others  
bringing more life for a moment  
disturbing memories only you can bring alive  
But, when you leave  
I shall close the door  
And once again all my memories  
silently lie.

By the accident of fortune a man may rule the world for a time,  
but by virtue of love he may rule the world forever.

Lao-Tse



Not chaos-like together crush'd and bruis'd,  
But, as the world, harmoniously confus'd:  
Where order in variety we see,  
And where, though all things differ, all agree.

Alexander Pope, *Windsor Forest*, 1704